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FOLK-TALES OF ANGOLA.

II.

THE notice awarded by the press to the first volume of the "Memoirs of The American Folk-Lore Society"—a publication of which any society might be proud—is entirely incommensurate with the value of the book. It therefore gives us pleasure to cite from "The Speaker," (London) of September 15, portions of an appreciative notice, which (although the article is unsigned) is from the pen of Mr. John O'Neill:—

This is a model book. Not alone does it give every one of its fifty stories in the local dialects of the Ki-mbundu tongue, with literal translations on alternate pages; but, while thus conveying to us Angolan (or, more closely, Ngolan) folk-tales at first-hand, the volume is also to serve as a text-book for missionary and trade students of this particular black-African speech,—a point which makes for trustfulness in the folk-loving mind. . . . Its 629 notes are patterns of pith and brevity, good sense, and straight sound knowledge of the lore of the folk and of the linguist; Mr. Chatelain not being precisely the man to follow Bleek in the discouraging theory that "mythology is a product of the corruption of language."

There might be here added to Mr. Chatelain's many comparative instances a few by our own private detective. At page 69 we have the injunction by a deity to the wandering hero: "Cross not a river. All rivers, follow them up; thou shalt go round by their springs," which is just the holy circumambulation of the great Indian rivers in pilgrimages that take years upon years; and the injunction also coincides with the universal belief that ghosts cannot cross a stream. On the same page we find "the open circle" under the Universe-tree, wherein are gathered all the game that God (Nzambi) made, also all insects, the beasts of the water, and all birds. The clear and extremely interesting beliefs about the Netherland, Kalunga, are as like as need be to those of archaic Egypt. The way to it is down the grave, whence opens the long road to this underworld, ruled by a king whose name means Death and also Ocean. There the dead not only live on, somewhat as they did above-ground, but die again another death—as the wicked did in Egypt—and then enter another kingdom, which is the end of existence—a sort of Nirvana. "We, here in Kalunga, never comes one here to return again," says a shade to the medicine-man who voodooes himself into this Hades; "I cannot give thee to eat here: if thou eatest here, thou canst return no more." Just the Irish belief about the fairy *Sidhe*. . . . A strange—perhaps too fanciful—parallel to Browning's "Glove" (originally an early Spanish ballad) is to be made out at p. 239, where the suitor who did *not* run down the live deer becomes "our good son-in-law whom we have chosen," while the champion who did achieve the record is rejected because "he is a man of great heart, and if we gave our daughter to him he would beat her." The

theme is human, and need not have come into Spanish from the African Moors, nor into Angola through the Portuguese. But it seems clear, as Mr. Chatelain continually points out, that a vast number of words have, during the last 400 years, got from "Putu" (that is, Portugal) into the Angolan dialects, and with them have been assimilated social and folk ways and tale-fragments.

The weirdness of the magic Skulls, though, cannot have come from far Japan, no more than the Bantu skull itself. That too, it may be safely admitted, is widely (and alas, narrowly) human. Jack's Giant's "fee, faw, fum" turns up where the cannibal Dikishi "scents the smell of human beings;" and negroes can, Mr. Chatelain says, smell out a stranger in the house. . . . Jack's Beanstalk becomes in these tales a "cobweb which Spider has woven," or "the cord of Spider," and thereby is communication between earth and heavens, which are at length separated, as in Maoriland and elsewhere. But when "spider and cobweb go to a wedding-feast in the sky," it is another myth altogether, about the French floating "fil de la Vierge," which perhaps we have again in China in the star-tale of Chih Niu, the weaving-maiden.

The animal-lore is astonishing, and the transformations of the heroes, by "medicine," into animals, and back again, form the commonest and firmest belief of the natives. The subjects of cannibalism, monsters, slavery, deities, divination, namesakes, marriage customs, matriarchy and its attendant nepotism, are all well illustrated; but this review must be brought to a sudden end, else would the valuable volume entice us on and on interminably.

It does seem a shame that the rewards of toil should be so unequal; that an African traveller, who, with many soldiers and rifles, has amused himself by roaming through barbarous lands, should be regarded as a hero (though the danger he incurs is trifling), while a teacher and friend of the race, who has faced almost certain death in the unobtrusive labors of philanthropy, should be treated with indifference; that the superficial gleaning of tales, through an interpreter, should be granted equal attention with the painstaking publication of native literature, made by a scholar who is versed in the language, and, in this case, the creator of its written alphabet; but such is the way of the world.

To the comments above cited, it seems well to add remarks on the usefulness of the work in the various fields of folk-tale, usage, and religious belief.

I. *Märchen*. — Among the folk-tales of American negroes, fairy-tales, or *märchen*, play a very subordinate part; almost all the recorded stories are animal tales. It cannot, however, be inferred that this class of narratives does not abundantly exist in Africa; the present volume is an assurance of their presence in that continent. Part of the narrations of this type are no doubt of European origin, introduced through the Portuguese, who for four centuries have had

relations with Angola ; but the manner in which they are metamorphosed and appropriated is highly characteristic.

Thus the second number of the series is a version of Cinderella ; but, as the recorder observes : "The fundamental idea of exotic origin has become so perfectly covered with Angola foliage and blossoms, that science alone can detect the imported elements, and no native would believe that this *mu-soso* is not entirely Angolan." In this case, the heroine is included by her elder brother among the wedding presents made by him in order to win the governor's daughter, and becomes in this way a slave of her sister-in-law. She is set to menial tasks ; the scenery is characteristically African.

She fetches the fire-wood ; she gets the water. One day : "O Kamaria ! Mistress. Come, go to wash the clothes." She lifted up the tub ; she went to the landing to wash. She arrives under the fig-tree ; she sets the tub on the ground. She begins to cry, saying : "Woe ! woe to me ! since me, since my father and mother gave me birth. . . . But to-day they send me to wash ! Because of what ? "

With the help of the editor's notes, it is necessary to imagine the scene ; the dense bush, the cutting of the wood with a blunt native hatchet, the canoe-shaped tub set down on the edge of the lagoon, where the reeds had been cleared away, the only spot on the bank where security can be felt from the insidious approach of a crocodile ; the cry of despair, identical in sound with the *ai, ai*, of Greek tragedy ; the broken sentences of the sobbing victim, suddenly reduced from riches to servitude. One must needs allow that, in appropriating the European tale, the native reciter has introduced a local color, and a spirit which renders it superior in effect to the original version.

The heroine eventually flies, and reaches the house of a prince of the *ma-kishi* (cannibals and magicians), who is her friend, having been born on the same day with herself ; from him she obtains the magic casket which enables her to make a splendid display in the intervals of her attendance at church. At last she is discovered, and brought to the governor, whom she induces to send for her brother ; the latter, cast into prison, meditates on his offences toward his sister, and the probability of her vengeance ; but the request she makes of the governor is that the bride be sent home ; after this she goes with her treasures to live henceforth with the brother who sold her as a slave, and who is now enriched by her means. The *dénouement* of the tale compared with that of Grimm's version, gives food for reflection ; and the whole story, most interesting as a piece of literature, is well worth the pains which are needed to comprehend it ; for in order to understand these narratives, it is necessary to peruse them carefully, with the aid of the author's notes.

II. *Customs.* — In No. xxv. of this Journal (p. 147) appeared a brief but highly interesting and original communication on negro courtship. From this account, the first ever printed concerning the order proper to be observed in this relation, it seems that such wooing is or was conducted by formulas, some of which are of a riddling character. According to verbal information further communicated on the subject, it would seem that courtship formulas are of a more or less constant character, so far as the verbal form is concerned. Now, from the tale of "The Four Uouas" (No. x. of Mr. Chatelain's collection), it seems that in Angola exchange of riddling sentences is an inseparable accompaniment of love-making. The hero of the tale is asked by the girls whom he is visiting how he has spent the day; he answers that he has spent it as an elephant spends it (that is, perhaps, with great joy). He has played like a player of backgammon (referring, possibly, to the forethought with which he has been considering his present step). "A nice bottle of bird-seed is food of birds. The wild fig-tree and the mubangu tree are ornaments of a home (that is, pretty girls exist for the purpose of getting married)." The elephant is lame because they shot him. The path is worn down, because they walked it (referring, probably, to the condition of the suitor, who thus points out his love-stricken condition). The conclusion is unlike anything which could occur in civilization. "They say, 'We accept.' They say, 'Let us pass time. The sun is down, the evening dark.' That thou thoughtest, saying, 'I will go to give them good-evening, we praise it, that thou didst so. The end.' He answered, saying, 'Is of God.' They continue their conversation. He says: 'I came because of thee, thou na Uoua the eldest.' Na Uoua says: 'Very well. Thou shalt marry me, if thou marriest us all, the four of us. If thou thinkest, that thou wilt have me alone, the eldest, thou canst not marry me. It must be that we marry our one man, the four of us in the fourhood of one mother.' The man assents, saying: 'I can marry you.' He gives them tobacco; he goes to his guest house; sleeps." The general idea of the conversation seems to be that a suitor must attest his cleverness by an encounter of wits; a trait which seems to represent an actual custom, if the present tale may be taken as an indication. In this case, the practice may be at the bottom of a long series of folk-tales and legends, in which, by putting riddles or otherwise, a heroine is made to test the merit of a suitor. (Compare American Versions of the Ballad of the Elfin Knight, No. xxvi. p. 228.)

III. *Religion.* — African religion is still a mystery. On this head Mr. Chatelain himself has contributed valuable information; from his account it would appear that the African is almost in the same mental condition as the Ojibway, who recognizes a Great Spirit but con-

siders that the immediate guardianship of the earth is given over to inferior powers. If we could get a detailed account of the worship, the ceremonies performed, and tales explaining the ceremonies, in spite of the continued contrary assertions of African travellers, who, in spite of their knowledge of the geography, possess only a superficial comprehension of mental conditions, we do not doubt that we should find evidence of the existence of deities and mythologies representing a tolerably high stage of religious development. It is probable that this earlier worship is connected with a series of tales of which the present collection presents no examples, namely, the tribal quasi-historical legends, which, it may be predicted, will be found to form the centre of ceremonial usages answering to those of American Indians, also connected with migration legends. Meantime, leaving for future investigators this prophecy, it will here be enough to point out the evidence of a single tale of this series, "The Child of Hunter and the Child of Deer." (No. xix.)

The wife of a hunter bears a child, and in order to perform the ritual usage, the father goes out to seek its "first food." The infant (as the editor explains), is confined in the dark hut until it shall receive its first solid food, an act which is made to constitute an introduction into the world of light; to this food sanctity is attached, for it is connected with the particular spirit (or, as might well be said, deity) to whom is owing the new addition to the family; each child will therefore have its own appropriate first food. The hunter climbs a tree, and waits his prey; in this case it is deer's meat of which he is in search. Presently appears a deer, and he is about to shoot; but the animal addresses him:—

Stay, please! Both of us, we are in need. Thou, Hunter, thy wife has born. The child needs its first-food, liver of deer. I too, Deer, my wife has born. The child needs its first-food, mudia-mbâmbi. Thou, if thou killest me first, my child will not get its first-food. Wait; I will take the first-food of my child, that I may take him out. To-morrow, when I come, thou, Hunter, shoot me, that thou mayest take thy child out.

On the morrow the deer appears, according to promise; the Hunter kills it, and procures the desired first-food. The tale concludes: "They take out the child of Hunter."

The writer is quite aware that this view may appear counter to testimony as distinguished as that of Dr. Büchner, who is reported as observing, in an address delivered before the Louisiana branch of this Society (vol. vi. 1893, p. 316): "He had come to the conclusion that the negro had no religion, as we know it. His god was quite another being. His belief was a polytheism made up of kobolds, devils, and the power of remedial fetishes. He had never

been able to combine his system into one harmonious whole, and that was the worst side of the negro." Now, so far as the absence of a system goes, this is true of all folk-religion, systematic comprehension of a mythic universe belonging to superior minds. But if it were maintained that the negro does not possess a native religion to which belongs a spiritual side (as well as a grossly barbaric aspect) the beautiful tale mentioned would in itself be a proof of the contrary. The story, like all these tales, excites curiosity more than it satisfies this passion. It will be observed how the note on custom transforms what would be in itself merely a curious legend into valuable ethnographic testimony.

These observations have been made on this volume, not in order to advertise a publication of The American Folk-Lore Society, but because the book appears to merit the highest praise. Take it all in all, we do not know where can be found any collection of folk-tales made among an uncivilized race which can claim equal attention. Among publications relating to African folk-tales, the only rival is Bishop Callaway's Zulu collection; the latter, in spite of its excellence, does not possess equal linguistic or ethnologic claims. The work is avowedly only a portion of a scheme, which it is greatly to be desired that the author may be able to carry out. Unhappily, at the present moment he is paying, in continued ill-health, the penalty too often rendered by missionaries in West Africa, who seldom escape from a ten years' residence with both life and physical vigor.

W. W. N.